(d) if so, the details thereof and the justifications therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (DR. SHAKEEL AHMAD): (a) There is a proposal to franchise basic postal services in locations where it is not possible to provide a post office.

(b) This proposal is in consonance with the policy directive under the 10th Plan, to explore more cost-effective means of providing basic postal facilities and reduce dependence on budgetary support in order to achieve financial self-sufficiency. Details of the franchisee scheme are yet to be firmed up.

(c) and (d) There is no proposal to privatize postal services. India has the largest Postal network in the world of which 89% is in the rural areas. The entire rural network is subsidized to the extent of 66 2/3% to 85%. given the mandate of fulfilling the Universal Service Obligation while functioning commercially and achieving financial self-sufficiency, the only option available is to identify more self-sustainable models for catering to those areas which need post office facility, but cannot justify one, as per the prescribed norms.

Provision of computer and internet in the villages

†3110. PROF. M.M. AGARWAL: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) the number of States/Villages in the country where Government have extended the facilities of computer and internet;

(b) the number of villages in the country where this facility has not been extended, so far; and

(c) the necessary steps being taken by Government to extend this facility in all the villages of the country?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (DR. SHAKEEL AHMAD): (a) to (c) Department of Information Technology (DIT) through National Informatics Centre (NIC) is providing e-governance support and NICNET backone to Central Government Department, States/UTs and District Administrations in the country. Computers & Internet connectivity

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

has been provided to all State Government Secretariats & UT Administrations as well as 587 districts in the country.

DIT had also taken up an initiative to set up Community Information Centres (CICs) in the hilly, far-flung areas of the country to bring the benefits of ICT to the people for socio-economic development of these areas. Under this initiative, DIT has supported 487 CICs at block level in the North Eastern States of Arunchal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Megalaya, Mizoram Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim; 135 CICs at block level in the State of Jammu & Kashmir; 41 Vidya Vahini CICs in the Andaman & Nicobar Island and 30 Vidya Vahini CICs at Lakshadweep Island.

DIT has also conceptualized and setup four pilot Rural IT Centres (Samadhan Kendras) at Tadepalligudem in Andhra Pradesh, Chitrakoor & Ujjain in Madhya Pradesh and Ramanathapuram in Tamil Nadu for dissemination of information to the villagers.

NIC jointly with the Maharashtra State Government have implemented "Warana Wired Village Project" to facilitate integrated development of the cooperative movement at grass-root level. This project connects 70 contiguous villages around Warana in the Kolhapur and Sangli districts of Maharashtra.

DIT recently have issued Guidelines to provide suport to State Governments to establish State Wide Area Networks (SWANs) from the State Headquarters up to the Block level with a minimum bandwidth capacity of 2 Mbps. SWANs connectivity would be progressively leveraged to provide services electronically to citizens at the village level by extending its reach through wireless and other technologies relevant for the last mile.

Deptt. of I.T. has now prepared draft guidelines to facilitate establishment of Common Services Centres (CSCs) in rural areas across the country. It is proposed to promote these centres through village level entrepreneurs adopting Public Private Partnership (PPP) mode. Such Centres would have flexibility to offer a mix of services (from Government & Non-Government including localized services) that may be needed by the local community.

Modernization of telegraph services in N.E. region

3111. SHRI DWINJENDRA NATH SHARMAH: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state: